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General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

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New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 *(continued)*

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: This morning, I should like once again, and very seriously, to appeal to all speakers scrupulously to adhere to the seven-minute limit that we have set for ourselves.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Gladys Caballero de Arévalo, Vice-President of the Republic of Honduras.

Mrs. Caballero de Arévalo (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Honduras, headed by His Excellency Mr. Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé, it is an honour for me to take part, along with so many other delegations, in this important special session to evaluate the implementation of the global Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The holding of this special session coincides with the year 2000, a time when human beings are instinctively pausing to reflect on the future of humankind. At the start of a new millennium, I am pleased to say that human beings are aware of women's pivotal role in development, and therefore in international peace. Aware of the importance of women, the Government of Honduras has achieved significant progress during the last five years in establishing a new legal framework beneficial to women's rights.

That progress is reflected in the country's Constitution, which establishes the right to freedom, health and equality without regard to sex, race, religion or social status. It can also be seen in the law against domestic violence, the code on childhood and adolescence, the law creating the National Institute for Women, the law on HIV/AIDS, the recently approved equal opportunity law for women and the reforms undertaken in agricultural modernization that establish the obligation to register plots of land in the names of couples and women heads of households.

Other achievements in the field of public policy include the development and implementation of the policy on equality in agriculture, the policy on equality in natural resources and the policy on sexual and reproductive health, by which we have been able to increase the use of contraceptive methods. That increase translates into a slow yet sustained reduction in the birth rate.

Likewise, we have also made progress by establishing the National Institute for Women at the State secretariat level, creating the post of attorney general for women and setting up the Family Council under the health secretariat to offer prevention,

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assistance and protection services to victims of domestic violence.

Since a primary interest of the Government of Honduras is to promote the participation of women in decision-making at all levels, a woman currently serves in the State Cabinet as Vice-President and another as President of the Central Bank. Additionally, women hold the posts of ministers in the security, finance, labour, tourism, and natural resources and environment departments. Women also play a role as State comptrollers and prosecutors.

Despite this progress, Honduras is still a developing country that has suffered from the negative consequences of globalization, which have created obstacles to the consolidation of the achievements attained and to progress towards the objectives established to benefit the more than 2.5 million women and girls in our country.

The majority of the Honduran population lives in poverty due to structural reasons, and according to data from the World Bank that poverty extends to over half of all families. The application of structural adjustment policies has had a negative impact on the most vulnerable social groups, particularly on poor women. There is limited access in Honduras to stable, paid work that provides social security, a fact that is linked to the absence of educational and training opportunities for women.

These challenges to development in Honduras were aggravated by the devastating impact of hurricane Mitch, which affected approximately 2 million people and left over 5,600 dead, 8,000 persons unaccounted for and about 12,000 injured. With regard to material losses, it is estimated that 70 per cent of agricultural production and 80,000 homes were destroyed.

We recognize that it is our responsibility to overcome the obstacles that hinder the achievement of the objectives set out in the global Platform for Action. For instance, we must improve policies aimed at households headed by women, which comprise 30 per cent of the households in Honduras. Similarly, we are deeply concerned by increased maternal mortality rates associated with the rise in immunological diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. We must also put in place policies that effectively address the needs of adolescents and that include sexual education, which ensures responsible sexual conduct. Likewise, we will continue fighting domestic violence against women in its psychological and physical manifestations.

Our Government reiterates the commitment it assumed in Beijing of advancing the implementation of the global Platform for Action while taking into account the consensus reached by Latin America and the Caribbean at the meetings held in Santiago and Lima. We place special emphasis on making progress in the development and implementation of the plan to fight poverty, which places at the centre of its concerns the needs and demands of women as agents of development, and on making sexual and reproductive health a priority for the development of our society through the national policy on sexual and reproductive health, including the application of integrated strategies to accelerate the reduction of maternal mortality, which, despite a decrease, remains unacceptably high. Other areas of interest in this regard are to address the health needs of adolescents from a systematic and integral perspective; to promote through public policies and their mechanisms the prevention and punishment of violence against women in all its manifestations; to make efforts in educational policies to increase the coverage and revision of educational content in order to guarantee non-sexist education; to strengthen the National Institute for Women at the political, institutional and financial level, as well as the other mechanisms established by the State to promote the advancement of women; and to energize dialogue and consultation with civil society, and with women's groups in particular, to unify efforts to implement the global Platform for Action.

In the globalized world in which we currently live, it is impossible to isolate one topic from another. Undoubtedly, the three topics of development, gender equality and peace are intimately interrelated — none of these important objectives can be obtained without the others. Conscious of this reality, and firmly attached to the objective of making the twenty-first century one in which globalization will be a positive force for the development of all human beings, especially women, I am honoured, on behalf of the people and the Government of Honduras, to reaffirm our commitment to take the necessary measures to ensure that women have available to them the requisite means to fulfil their indispensable role in world development.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saidie Tohma Abbas, Minister for Labour and Social Affairs of Iraq.

Mr. Abbas (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women for all the work done to prepare for this special session of the General Assembly.

There is no doubt that the implementation of women's rights and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women are among the priority objectives of the international community, and that they constitute an integral part of its activities. Those activities, in turn, have helped give shape to the norms that ensure the protection of women and promote their full participation in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, both at the national and international levels. Accordingly, the condition of women and the improvement of their status can be dealt with only within the framework of an all-encompassing view of human rights in general and to the extent that these rights are affected by economic, social and political conditions and variables.

Throughout the ages, women in Iraq have enjoyed rights and privileges recognized by custom and guaranteed by law. That state of affairs was embodied in the very first legislation known to history, the Code of Hammurabi, which affirmed the legal personhood of women. Within this framework, and in the context of social and economic developments in Iraq and the accompanying ambitious development plans, a number of legislative measures have been enacted whose provisions were inspired by the tolerant nature of Islamic law and Iraq's cultural and humanitarian heritage. These measures have ensured women's rights to health care, education and political participation, as well as to everything relating to the advancement of women, the amelioration of their economic and social conditions, the eradication of poverty and unemployment, and the improvement of professional training and rehabilitation.

Those measures have also provided greater participation and protection for women and have thus led to the removal of all traditional barriers and restrictions obstructing the progress of women, and have created equality between men and women in various sectors.

In support of the legislative and executive steps it has taken to improve the status of women, the Republic of Iraq has acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which has now been incorporated into our national legislation. The Government has also adopted a national strategy for the advancement of Iraqi women in the light of elements of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Despite the abnormal circumstances in which Iraq lives owing to the continuation of the unjust embargo that has been imposed on it for the past 10 years, and to the continuous military aggression waged by the United States and the United Kingdom, the Iraqi Government has formed a high-level national committee for the advancement of Iraqi women, which has the task of formulating policies and establishing mechanisms that will ensure the implementation of those policies both at the official and the grass-roots levels, as well as creating specialized committees for the advancement of women in official institutions, professional organizations and associations. In addition, it has reactivated the role of non-governmental organizations concerned with women, in particular the General Federation of Iraqi Women.

In any country, the implementation of human rights, including the right to development — and especially women's rights — depends on three elements: the political will of the State, the resources available, and international cooperation. There is no doubt that the continued imposition of comprehensive sanctions on Iraq has neutralized two of these elements — available resources and international cooperation — thus isolating the first, political will, from the other two and rendering it effectively unrealizable. The implementation of human rights has thus proved to be unfeasible, and the only fair solution to this problem lies in removing all the restrictions and lifting the embargo in order to facilitate the flow of resources needed for Iraq to carry out all national programmes and international obligations.

In this connection, we should like to point out that article 145 (i) of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action urged Governments and international and regional organizations to take action in accordance with international law with a view to alleviating the adverse effects of economic sanctions on women and children. But it made no provision for a mechanism for

implementation by the United Nations organs and agencies concerned with following up the Beijing Platform for Action, and it has thus remained only ink on paper. Moreover, paragraph 746 of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit on Social Development (A/AC.253/13) points out that the severe crisis in Iraq caused by sanctions has reduced standards of living generally and increased poverty.

It is worth mentioning that, as noted in reports of international humanitarian organizations, of which the latest is the 1999 report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the oil for food programme signed by the Republic of Iraq and the United Nations in order to meet some of the basic needs of the Iraqi people has not halted the deterioration of the humanitarian situation of women and children. Furthermore, in its decision 1999/110 of 26 August 1999, on the humanitarian situation in Iraq, the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights appealed to the international community and to the Security Council to lift the embargo because it constitutes a violation of the rights of the civilian population.

The progress achieved by Iraqi women in the cultural, social and economic spheres has been undermined by the imposition and continuation of the embargo and by the accompanying collapse of the country's infrastructure. The embargo has wrought destruction in all sectors and amenities of life and has inflicted incalculable damage on all sectors of Iraqi society, in particular women and children, the two groups most likely to be affected by environmental and economic conditions.

The acute shortages of food, medicines and other basic necessities of life have deprived the Iraqi people, and above all women and children, of their livelihood. This is clearly and alarmingly reflected in the state of health of women, particularly mothers and women of child-bearing age. The latest survey conducted by UNICEF indicates that the present rate of maternal mortality is 294 per 10,000 live births, and that the incidence of anaemia among pregnant women has risen to 60 per cent, leading to an increase in the percentage of newborn babies weighing less than 2.5 kilogrammes. In addition, there has been a proliferation of diseases of the thyroid gland and of premature births, as well as an eight-fold increase in the incidence of viral hepatitis and infections of the respiratory system among mothers and children as compared with their incidence before the embargo.

The environmental pollution caused by the use by United States and United Kingdom forces of depleted uranium bombs, which are a new generation of radioactive weapons, has led to the emergence of incurable diseases among women, including miscarriages, sterility, congenital embryonic deformities, cancerous diseases such as leukaemia, breast cancer and cancer of the ovaries, and neurological and muscular disorders. There were 3,894 recorded cases of cancer among Iraqi women in 1999, and the total number of deaths among women due to causes specifically related to the embargo is 261,563, in addition to the death of some 8,000 children under the age of five every month.

Women have been affected not only physically, but also psychologically and socially, by the embargo and the United States-British military aggression. They have suffered social and psychological disorders, including anxiety, depression, tension and lack of concentration. Numerous studies have indicated that 57 per cent of women suffer from such conditions and have pointed to a rise in the incidence of divorce because of worsening conditions and economic pressures. Women have been forced to abandon their careers, because the ever-higher cost of living and inflation have led them to turn full time to domestic responsibilities in order to cope with the burdens of life, which keep growing heavier day by day — to say nothing of the great number of women and girls dropping out of educational institutions at every level because of a lack of financial resources.

Thus, the abnormal conditions brought about by the embargo since its imposition in 1990, and the accompanying daily acts of military aggression committed within the illegal no-fly zones by United States and United Kingdom aircraft, whose bombs make no distinction between civilian and military targets or between an infant and an old woman, have inflicted very grave material and moral damage on the civilian population.

In the light of these tragic facts, which have attained dimensions that cannot be ignored, the international community is now duty-bound to examine most scrupulously the grave consequences of the imposition of such sanctions on States and to demand an end to such sanctions, because they constitute a

crime against humanity. On behalf of the women and the children of Iraq, we appeal to members to shoulder their legal and humanitarian responsibilities and do their utmost to put an end to this suffering by lifting the sanctions, which have proved to be contrary to all values and laws that have been generally accepted by human societies past and present. In that way, the women of Iraq will be able to resume their true role in building the family and civilized society. We are confident that our appeal will meet with a positive response from the Assembly.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Judit Szemkeő Szilágy, State Secretary, Ministry of Social and Family Affairs of Hungary.

Ms. Szilágy (Hungary): In accordance with its traditions, Hungary is firmly committed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We welcome the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. At the same time, we regret that universal ratification of the Convention could not be achieved by the year 2000. The fact that the Convention has been ratified by 165 States is, however, a positive sign; the number of signatories of the Optional Protocol is also growing. The Government of Hungary has submitted the Protocol to parliament so that our country can accede to it.

Let me refer to some important facts from Hungarian history with respect to the issue of equal opportunities for women. The opportunity for girls to attend school was proclaimed in Hungary as early as the eighteenth century. Schooling for girls and boys between the ages of 6 and 12 became compulsory as early as 1868. The first kindergarten was founded in the first half of the nineteenth century — by a woman, incidentally. In the second half of the nineteenth century, more than 5 per cent of the teachers were women. As early as the end of the nineteenth century, there were female students in the universities of Hungary. The first woman member of the Hungarian parliament was elected in 1920.

Providing full-time work for every woman was declared a goal in Hungary in the 1950s. This policy was double-faceted. On the one hand, there were disadvantages. As the model of the family had changed from reliance on one person's income to reliance on two persons' income, women had no choice but to seek work. They became overburdened by having to undertake both employment in the workplace and traditional house chores. At the same time, there was no institutional protection of women. On the other hand, there were also advantages to this system. Institutions needed for full-time child care — nurseries, kindergartens and schools — were established all over the country. More and more girls began to study in higher education. Today, about 50 per cent of 18-year-old girls are enrolled as university students. All the professions became wide open for women — even politics.

With the democratic changes, several problems came to the surface in the country. About 5.8 per cent of women are unemployed, but the rate of unemployment is much higher for women over the age of 40. Women's participation in politics and public life has remained regrettably low, because the earlier policy was merely declaratory, there was a lack of genuine motivation and women did not really possess the means to pursue their interests. In order to ensure equal opportunity in practice, Hungary has put special emphasis on efforts to give women real possibilities for choice.

The country is seeking to promote the employment of women and to plan the wider availability of part-time job opportunities; to help women and men reconcile work and family duties; to increase childcare subsidies, subject to improving economic conditions, and to make them available to both parents as a basic citizen's right; to set up institutions for the protection of victims of family abuse; to enhance the role of education and training for careers, professional orientation and employment, as well as in relation to family planning and the prevention of violence in the family; and to improve institutional recourse to legal remedies.

The development of civil society and cooperation with it are among the cornerstones of democracy and gender equality in our country. The Council of Women's Representation, established in 1999, has among its members representatives of civil organizations as well as of various Government ministries and academic life. Cooperation between civil society and the scientific community in initiating laws and programmes for the promotion of gender equality has been promising.

Hungary continues to be committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

In this context, we attach particular importance to the full implementation of the principles formulated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We share the opinion that Governments have the primary responsibility for making progress in the 12 areas of special concern.

I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate that my country supports all international efforts leading to the classification of all gender-based crimes, including sexual slavery and enforced prostitution, as crimes against humanity or war crimes, as defined in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. We share in particular the objective of improving the legal literacy and awareness of women, in conformity with the principle that women's rights are human rights.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Aitkul Samakova, Minister, Chairperson of the National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Samakova (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): The World Conference on the status of women in Beijing played an outstanding role in the development of the women's movement throughout the entire world. The Platform for Action, adopted at the Conference, in many ways defined the direction of the development of the women's movement at the end of the second and the beginning of the third millennium.

We welcome the establishment, following the Beijing Conference, of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and, if necessary, undertaking additional measures to ensure its implementation. Following a government initiative, Kazakhstan's Gender in Development Bureau has been transformed into a United Nations gender bureau, responsible for coordinating all United Nations agencies in the area of family and women, as well as for rendering assistance in resource mobilization for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

We greatly value the activities of the United Nations in preparing for this session of the General Assembly. We have had the opportunity to participate in a number of preparatory conferences. One such conference for the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Mongolia and Turkey, entitled "Beijing + 5: conclusions and perspectives", was held in Kazakhstan.

During that conference, it was noted that countries in economic transition have many problems in common and that we should address them collectively. That is why the participants in that conference suggested forming a regional intergovernmental group. We also considered the possibility of establishing a committee on gender issues within the framework of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the CIS and the Regional Council of Heads of National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women. Currently, all of these issues are being discussed with the Governments of the countries that participated in the conference.

In order to support the women's movement in Kazakhstan, the post of Chairperson of the National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs — a ministerial position in the Republic, directly under the head of State — was introduced for the first time, a position that I assumed.

The main goal of the National Commission is to act as an institutional catalyst for addressing women's issues. It has been given wide responsibilities and functions. Its mandate has allowed us to work in close cooperation with all ministries and agencies and to adopt, at the Government level, the National Action Plan for Improving the Status of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

A significant amount of work is being carried out in Kazakhstan for the political advancement of women. In accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, women and men in our country are given equal rights in all spheres of life and activities. We have joined over 20 international conventions and agreements, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A further five conventions are currently in the process of being prepared for ratification. Among them are the conventions relating to equal pay for women and men for equal work and to minimum working age.

Women's non-governmental organizations, which amount to over 100, are very active in the area of the political advancement of women. Last year, they registered their first political party, the Political Alliance of Women's Organizations. However, declarations of equal rights for men and women are not always supported by real guarantees and equal opportunities.

Women are under-represented at all decision-making levels. For example, out of 116 Members of Parliament, there are only 13 women — a total of 11 per cent. Among the Ministers, I am the only woman. In the executive State bodies, only 7 per cent to 8 per cent of the top decision makers are women. There are few women in decision-making positions even in traditionally female spheres of public life.

In order to achieve gender balance in society, we have started to include gender expertise in the entire national legislation, as well as to develop the draft law on equal rights and opportunities. Beginning last year, a statistical brochure entitled "Women and men of Kazakhstan" was being published to reflect all aspects of the gender situation in the country.

Gender issues are also regularly covered on the pages of the National Commission's journal entitled *Women: East and West*, as well as in many other publications of the mass media.

We have succeeded in drawing the attention of politicians and society to such important issues as violence against women. With the support of the mass media, we are working to sensitize the population on preventive measures against violence. The first crisis centre shelter for female victims of violence was established with State participation. Currently, a draft law on domestic violence is being developed. We support and are very actively participating in the international zero tolerance for violence against women campaign, which is scheduled to be held in the year 2001.

One of the main priorities of the National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs is the economic advancement of women. In Kazakhstan, before perestroika, light industry was well developed and about 90 per cent of women were employed in that area. But, with the restructuring of the economy, these enterprises to a large degree are today shut down or not fully functioning. In order to revise light industry and provide employment to women, the Government of Kazakhstan is offering a number of significant incentives to enterprises in this industry. There are three-year tax holidays and a zero rate of value added tax. Despite this, many enterprises today are not working at full capacity because they need investments.

We discussed these issues at the Eurasian Economic Summit, which was held in April 2000 in Almaty. We also presented the participants in the summit with business plans of our enterprises. Therefore, I would like to invite the representatives of business and financial circles present here in Kazakhstan to participate in these investment programmes.

Since 1999, a microcredit programme for the most vulnerable citizens has been in implementation. Two thirds of the beneficiaries are women, mainly from rural areas. Experience has shown that even a small microcredit amount plays a significant role in the development of women's entrepreneurship. In our situation, this is primarily an effort to eradicate poverty. Unfortunately, despite outside financing, we are suffering from a lack of credit resources. A special credit line has been established in one of the banks to support women's entrepreneurship in the productive sphere, following the initiative of the National Commission, but that is not enough. This is why we are very glad that in the draft conclusions of our session, a special task has been given to United Nations country offices and international organizations to take measures to render assistance to Governments of the countries in transition in their elaboration and implementation of plans and programmes aimed at the expansion of economic opportunities for women. We hope that the United Nations can draw the attention of the world financial institutions to this extremely important problem.

Another problematic area of activity is women's health. In Kazakhstan, the health index for women is only 30 per cent; in some areas, it is only 20 per cent or less. Two thirds of our women are suffering from anaemia. There has been an increase in breast cancer and a consequent significant increase in women's mortality. Overall, this is to a great degree attributed to the many years of nuclear tests at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and the Aral ecological catastrophe.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the United Nations United Nations Fund for Population Activities, the United Nations Children's Fund and other international organizations for the assistance they have been providing. We greatly appreciate the United Nations recommendations to international organizations to provide resources to national

programmes on the implementation of the Platform for Action in all 12 critical areas. For us, women's health is one such critical area.

This special session of the General Assembly will define new tasks and directions for activities leading towards the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and further measures and initiatives to ensure equality between men and women, development and peace in the twenty-first century. For our part, we will do everything possible for the attainment of these noble goals. I propose that we adopt the text of the Political Declaration and the draft conclusions of our session, taking into consideration the aforementioned comments and suggestions of our delegation.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Osmo Soininvaara, Minister for Health and Social Welfare of Finland.

Mr. Soininvaara (Finland): Finland aligns itself with the statement made by the Portuguese Minister for Equality on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make a few additional remarks on issues that are of particular interest to Finland.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was an important milestone in the advancement of women and gender equality. Now a strong recommitment is needed in order to fully implement the results reached five years ago. After Beijing, the Government of Finland adopted and implemented a Plan of Action. Now the Government will decide how to proceed.

Finland welcomes the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We support its speedy ratification and entry into force. In Finland, the ratification will be concluded in a few months' time.

Almost 100 years ago, Finland was the first country in the world to give women full political rights. Today, we have a female President and a female Speaker of the Parliament. Women are well represented in political life at all levels. The quota provisions have had a dramatic effect on women's participation, especially at the local level. The quota system requires a minimum of 40 per cent of both men and women in governmental and municipal bodies.

In Finland, women have been active developers of the welfare State. Social security, as well as social and health-care services, especially day care for children and parental leave, make it possible for mothers and fathers to work outside the home and earn their living. Inequality between women and men, however, remains a fact in working life. Women's salaries are, on average, about 82 per cent of men's salaries, for several reasons. Finnish women are highly educated, working outside the home, actively involved in political life and economically independent. However, they face the burden of reconciling the family and the growing demands of working life. In the so-called new economy that is rapidly growing in Finland, individual competition between workers and the strong commitment required to work can result in a situation where parents — both mothers and fathers — do not use their legal parental rights. As a father, I have to say that fathers are also deprived of their children and family because of the growing demands of working life.

Violence against women is a serious human rights violation. The Beijing Conference and the work carried out by the United Nations Development Fund for Women have raised awareness of this problem. In accordance with its Plan of Action, the Government of Finland has taken responsibility to combat violence against women. Sexual offences are extensively defined as offences subject to public prosecution. The legislation on restraining orders effectively protects women against violence. Restraining orders prohibit violent persons from approaching their victims. This legislation has proved to be very effective. More than 1,000 restraining orders were issued in one year. An extensive victimization survey on violence against women was conducted in Finland recently. A study on the cost of violence caused to individuals, employers and society will soon be published.

Girl children require particular attention. The feminization of poverty starts with the treatment of girl children. Poverty and gender-based inequities, together with lack of education and inadequate access to health care, have serious consequences.

Today's new challenge worldwide is how to help women and girls make better use of information and communications technology. The revolution in this field can and should empower women. It offers access to information on health, education, training, financing and so on, and it will also help women's networking all over the world.

HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest health risks and threats to development at the moment. As the new chairperson of the Programme Coordination Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, I would like to address this crucial issue.

The epidemic of HIV/AIDS has made a clear linkage between poverty, health, access to care and human rights. HIV is increasingly affecting women, children and young people. In the age group from 15 to 20 years, for every infected boy there are five or six infected girls. How are we to protect young women and girls against HIV/AIDS? The realization of women's sexual and reproductive rights, including their rights to information and services, are of great importance. I take this opportunity to encourage the development of national educational programmes on health issues for young girls and boys.

The involvement of civil society is crucial in achieving full gender equality. We, as representatives of Governments, must support the non-governmental organizations in their role and continue the dialogue with them. However, Governments have the primary responsibility for the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted at Beijing, as well as for the actions to be adopted here. I hope that our recommitment will lead to more accelerated actions. Gender equality and the advancement of women will continue to be major issues in the twenty-first century.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Nyam-Osor Tuya, Minister for External Relations of Mongolia.

Mrs. Tuya (Mongolia): It is indeed a privilege for me to represent Mongolia at this very special session of the General Assembly. This session is the first global conference on women's rights and gender equality to be held in the twenty-first century. We must therefore seize this opportunity not only to reaffirm our commitment to the goal of gender equality, but also to agree on specific actions and initiatives to achieve measurable progress in all areas of women's advancement, as outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Beijing Platform for Action remains the quintessential document on women's advancement and gender equality, drawing on the wisdom and experience of the twentieth century. The past century brought us a long way from emancipation to empowerment. Women live longer and healthier lives, are better schooled and have become more economically active and legally literate. Most importantly, women's rights have universally been recognized as full-fledged human rights. Important pillars for empowerment of women have been developed, such as the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, complemented recently by the unanimous adoption of its Optional Protocol. I am pleased to announce that Mongolia will sign this Protocol very soon and complete the ratification process within the year.

Despite all this, however, there is still a long way to go to make this world a better place for women to live in. Inequalities persist. Worldwide, women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of poverty, violence, illiteracy, dislocation, poor nutrition and ill health. Women are the first to fall victim to armed conflicts, HIV/AIDS and outrageous transnational crimes, such as trafficking in persons. We are all only too well aware of all these challenges, but far too often action lags behind rhetoric. I wish to associate myself with all those who have spoken before me in favour of better coordinated and forceful action to advance our agenda for women's empowerment, so vigorously outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. We share the view that, here at this session, we must come up with a strong action-oriented document drawing extensively on best practices in various areas in various parts of the world.

Enabling women to become equal collaborators in and beneficiaries of development will require forging genuine partnerships between men and women; between the public sector, civil society and the private sector; as well as between affluent and poor nations.

In my own country, Mongolia, we are working to build these partnerships and to promote responsible cooperation. We have enacted new legislation and revised some older acts to mainstream gender into policies and programmes. The new Labour Code contains specific provisions prohibiting discrimination in the workplace. Women's equal rights in inheritance, land use, ownership of livestock and other property are provided for in civil and family laws. Right after the Beijing Conference, the Government of Mongolia adopted a National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, which works in tandem with the Unemployment Reduction Programme and the National Poverty Alleviation Programme. The National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women aims at

creating equal opportunities for women and covers a number of interrelated areas, such as women's economic activities, poverty, health, education, rural women, family, women and decision-making, violence against women, human rights, the environment, national machinery and mass media.

Poverty reduction has been and still is our priority. Thus, a Women's Development Fund has been set up under the National Poverty Alleviation Programme, which has focused on income generation, especially for female-headed households, rural health and non-governmental organization capacity-building. Projects for female-headed households include pre-school strengthening components so that single mothers can engage in wage-earning activities. There are more than 40 women's non-governmental organizations operating in Mongolia and they are actively involved in the implementation of the National Poverty Alleviation Programme, especially through organizing skill-developing activities. The National Poverty Alleviation Programme works in line with the Government's development strategy and its local implementation is ensured by subprogrammes at the provincial level.

The share of the private sector in Mongolia's economy has risen from some 6 per cent 10 years ago to more than 70 per cent. Women make up half of the national workforce in Mongolia and many more are now employed in the private sector. According to Mongolia's Employers' Federation, women own more than a quarter of private enterprises in Mongolia. The overall positive impact of these activities should be gauged not only in terms of better living standards for women engaged in business, but also, and most importantly, in terms of the renewed sense of self-reliance associated with the expansion of individual initiative. We therefore believe that there should be a continued effort in the field of human resource development, including women's resources development, notably through vocational training, so that many more can benefit from opportunities offered by a market economy.

The challenges faced by women in my country include complex interrelated problems in the domains of poverty, unemployment, health, education, social protection and culture and behaviour. Women tend to have less job security as workers and less access to information and credit as entrepreneurs. They are also more likely to be poor if they are heads of households. Social dislocation, in some cases, generates frustration which, at times, translates into crime and violence, including domestic violence. As a result of complacency and silence, alcohol abuse has become a major cause of family breakdown, domestic violence, street children and neglected children, prostitution and suicide among teenagers. We think it important to learn from the experiences and best practices of other countries in dealing with these issues and in promoting zero tolerance with regard to violence against women and to step up our action to address them more vigorously, including through prevention and education.

I wish to touch briefly upon issues related to rural women. Rural women are of critical importance in agricultural production and in the rural economies of developing countries, including my own country. Of the entire female population of Mongolia, 45.1 per cent lives in rural areas, leading nomadic or semi-nomadic ways of life. The transition to a market economy has brought both opportunities and challenges to the rural population, including women. The privatization of about 30 million heads of livestock instantly turned herdsmen and herdswomen into owners, thus contributing to the improvement of their economic wealth.

But on the other hand, poor resources continue impeding rural women's and girls' access to basic social services, such as primary health care and quality education. Poor infrastructure in rural areas deprives them of access to modern information technology. We therefore believe it important to renew our commitment to the situation of rural women. A General Assembly resolution on rural women, adopted at its fifty-fourth session at the initiative of Mongolia, called for a comprehensive study on the situation of the challenges faced by rural women, including case studies and expert meetings and workshops to determine, quantify and explain the impact of globalization and poverty on rural women. Mongolia will be actively working with the relevant entities of the United Nations and fellow Members to implement the provisions of that resolution.

Strong political will and resources are the sine qua non of women's empowerment. I take the high-level participation at this session as a vivid demonstration of our political will to promote gender equality worldwide. But I believe that this will needs to be complemented by a commitment to provide

resources in a more focused way. My delegation believes that there is ample room for more effective utilization of the available resources, both domestic and external, for women's empowerment. According to a recent United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) report on the progress of the world's women, only 5 per cent of the national budgets of most countries are currently allocated to gender-specific activities. We have to allocate more, including through raising decision makers' awareness of all the potential benefits of engendering national and local budgets. The same can be applied to official development assistance. In Mongolia we are planning cooperative activities with the United Nations Development Fund for Women in the area of financing women's empowerment.

Last month we held an interesting seminar in Mongolia, supported by the United Nations Development Programme and the Swedish International Development Agency on the emerging concept of human security. The debate here at this session echoes much of our discussion at that seminar. To me this means that empowering women and ensuring gender equality means working towards ensuring human security, working together, men and women, working for the benefit of all, for the benefit of our children and grandchildren.

The President: I now call on Mrs. Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State of the United States of America.

Mrs. Albright (United States of America): I am honoured to address this landmark General Assembly session and delighted to have the opportunity to follow the Foreign Minister of Mongolia, who is part of a small but growing group of women foreign ministers. There are now 14 of us. I congratulate all who helped to organize this week's events, and all who have laboured to transform the powerful promise of the Beijing Conference into the reality of a richer, fuller and fairer life for women and girls.

Our movement to recognize and support women's rights is one of the most revolutionary and uplifting forces now shaping the world. It is liberating individuals and strengthening families, from remote villages to our largest cities. And it is still young, still blossoming, still only beginning to spread the good news of opportunity and equality for women.

This historic meeting marks another milestone in our long journey upward to justice. It enables us to assess gains made during the past five years and obliges us to chart a path that will lead to ever-more rapid progress in the new century. I am proud that I had the opportunity to join many of you at the Beijing Conference and also at Huairou, and proud to have accompanied America's First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, whose very presence in Beijing made a statement and whose statement there made history.

It is no longer possible, after Beijing, to deny that women's rights are human rights and are indivisible from the universal rights of every human being. It is no longer possible, after Beijing, to conceive of development separate from the advancement of women, because no society can move ahead if half its population is held back.

It is no longer possible, after Beijing, to argue that abuses against women are merely cultural and that there is nothing any of us can do about them. Because when a woman is raped, beaten or mutilated, it is not cultural, it is criminal; and no Government, after Beijing, can deny its responsibility to stop these crimes.

The call that went forth from Beijing was a call to action, and the United States has responded. Coordinated by President Clinton's Interagency Council on Women, and in partnership with non-governmental organizations, we have moved forward as a team to fulfil the commitments we have made. For example, our Department of Health and Human Services has made new investments in the early detection and treatment of breast and cervical cancer, launched a National Women's Health Clearinghouse and waged war on HIV/AIDS.

The Department of Labor has strengthened our policies on family leave, increased our investments in childcare, helped millions of women find good jobs and encouraged employers across America to provide equal pay for equal work. The Treasury Department has expanded small-business and micro-enterprise credit, thereby helping women-owned businesses to grow in number twice as fast as those overall.

The Justice Department has combined tough new laws against domestic abuse with assistance to states and localities to help victims and prevent crimes. And we have established a 24-hour Domestic Violence Hotline, which provides crisis intervention, counselling and referrals every hour of the day in every part of our country.

We have also intensified efforts to gain our Senate's approval of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Some Senators would like us to give up, but we will not because there is no weariness in a cause that is just. Have no doubt, we will be back again and again until this Convention becomes the law of our land.

Finally, in the State Department we have placed efforts to advance the status of women and girls right where they belong: in the mainstream of American foreign policy. Through the Vital Voices Democracy Initiative we are mobilizing public- and private-sector resources and bringing women from around the world together to exchange knowledge and achieve results in support of freedom, prosperity and peace.

Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), we are helping women bring down the barriers to political participation as advocates and voters, legislators and leaders. We are backing projects that enhance economic opportunity through greater access to credit, education and comprehensive health care.

We know that when women are able to make our own decisions, whole societies benefit, which is why our contributions to international family planning help to ease economic hardships, save women's lives, reduce the number of abortions and enable children to grow up healthy and strong.

We have also launched a major diplomatic and law-enforcement initiative to halt trafficking in human beings. This rapidly growing criminal enterprise has gone global, distorting economies, degrading societies, endangering neighbourhoods and robbing millions, mostly women and children, of their dreams.

The Clinton-Gore Administration is joining with others in an effort to stop this deadly traffic cold. Domestically, we are working with Congress to enact a strong new law that will punish perpetrators more effectively and protect and care for victims more thoroughly. Overseas, we are forging partnerships on every continent to share information, coordinate legal actions and find and close criminal networks.

This morning, I invite everyone here to join in a multi-year, multinational effort to win the fight against trafficking. If we are divided, we have no hope, but together, we will prevail. What a gift to the future that will be!

Five months ago, we crossed the threshold into a new century, amid celebration but also determination. For it is not enough to look back at how far we have come. Too many of our sisters still live surrounded by the four walls of poverty and exploitation, discrimination and conflict. Together we must strive to see that the benefits of globalization are shared not just by some people in some countries, but by all people in every country. As Hillary Clinton said on Monday,

> "When it comes to women, globalization should not mean marginalization."

Accordingly, we must redouble our efforts to make education and training in twenty-first century skills more available, so that poverty retreats and opportunity spreads around the equator and from pole to pole.

We must also learn more about the positive and negative impacts of globalization and trade on the lives of women. We do not know as much as we should and, unless we learn more, we will not be doing as much as we should to ensure that trade works for all people.

In recent years, I have had the privilege of meeting women from every corner of the world who are championing greater freedom, broader opportunity, better health, more fairness and other planks in the Beijing Platform for Action. Some of these women have been beaten back, beaten down or beaten up, but they have never been defeated because their pride is too strong and their faith in our shared cause is unshatterable.

The women's movement has flourished because of the underlying power of its central premise, which is that every individual counts. Each of us should have the knowledge and power to make our own decisions. We may make different choices about how to live, where to work and even what to wear, but we must all have the right to decide.

Our movement is not about making each woman the same. It is about recognizing and appreciating women's diversity, and about treating each individual fairly. This principle is the magnet that has brought us together across the boundaries of ethnicity and vocation, generation and gender. It is the power of this principle that enables us to envision the day when every girl, everywhere, will be able to look ahead with confidence that her life will be valued, her individuality respected, her rights protected and her

future determined solely by her own ability and character.

This is the goal we set in Beijing five years ago. That is our purpose here in New York this week, and that is the mission that will lift our spirits, guide our actions and unite our efforts in countries across the globe for many years to come. Thank you all very much for all we can do together.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Hilda Kari, Minister for Women, Youth and Sports of Solomon Islands.

Ms. Kari (Solomon Islands): At the outset, may I, on behalf of my delegation, congratulate you, Sir, once again on your election to the presidency of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to recommit the international community to the principles of the Beijing Declaration. Consistency and continuity are important if women and men are to see themselves as equal partners at all levels, from the family right up to decision-making.

I would like to pay tribute to those women and men who, since 1946 and following the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women, laboured with determination in advocating women's rights and advancement. Since then eight more conferences have been held, and this twenty-third special session is the ninth of these important international forums. I am very grateful for the opportunity to be part of this occasion, and especially to meet such women as the previous speaker, and to reflect on the achievements as well as the constraints of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. My delegation is confident that under your able leadership, Mr. President, this event will provide the impetus for the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the future.

The major constraints that hinder the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in my country are obvious. Among them are the high rate of illiteracy and the lack of resources and capacity. Women constitute about 48 per cent of our population. However, only 17 per cent are literate. Access to formal education is a major problem for women. While school enrolment figures for girls are increasing, they are still among the lowest in our region. Eradication of illiteracy through education and training is key to the successful implementation of the Platform for Action in Solomon Islands in future.

Experience has shown that investment in girls' education translates directly and quickly into better nutrition for the whole family, better health care, smaller families, poverty reduction and better overall economic performance. Additionally, without financial resources and trained personnel, wider and timely implementation of women's programmes and projects at the national level, in particular in the rural areas, is a daunting task. Current economic and financial difficulties have also affected our ability to advance the women's agenda at the national level, particularly in the rural areas.

Equally important is the need for coherent coordination among the various government agencies and non-governmental organizations, including church groups. The church network in Solomon Islands reaches all communities and in many areas is the only formal assistance available. It is a crucial means through which adequate funding and programmes should be channelled and implemented to ensure that assistance reaches those in real need. Solidarity among our women will be a vital determinant of progress.

Realizing the importance of women's participation, and to facilitate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Solomon Islands Government established the Department of Women, Youth and Sports, as well as a child-care and social welfare unit within the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. Under the Government's general statement of policies for 1997-2001, the following elements are emphasized: the promotion and support of women's participation in decision-making and national development; encouraging policy development for women; the facilitation of appropriate training programmes for all women at all levels; the facilitation of the flow of information, communication and linkages to rural women; the coordination of women's projects and activities in government; liaison with non-governmental organizations; and the introduction of legislation to protect women's interests.

Furthermore, at the beginning of 1999 a policy matrix for women containing key result areas, policy actions, variable indicators, time-frames and responsibilities was developed. The goal is to enhance

the level of women's participation in the development process.

The most significant action was my Government's endorsement and adoption of the Solomon Islands National Women's Policy in 1999. This is a major milestone for women in my country, considering the sad fact that the policy had been rejected by past Governments six times within a period of 10 years. That policy is not only a translation of the relevant constitutional provisions, but also accommodates the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

While maternal and infant mortality rates have decreased, they are still high by developed world standards. The promotion of maternal and child health care and family planning through the strengthening of the maternal child health-care unit of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will be a major component of the Government's plans. Above all, attitudes towards family planning require further improvement, and family planning services need to be made readily available.

In relation to women and human rights, the Solomon Islands national Constitution provides for equal rights and freedoms for every citizen, regardless of gender. It also embraces the principles of unity and justice. A number of women's organizations are therefore currently undertaking awareness-raising activities, educating women about their rights to protection from all forms of violence against women, especially legal rights. Similar initiatives are required to address the increasing problems of alcohol abuse, domestic and sexual violence and family break-ups. The Solomon Islands Government is committed to introducing legislation to address these problems.

Solomon Islands, a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is striving to fulfil its obligations under the Convention. We are working closely with various organizations in advocating the rights of the child, including those of the girl child. With the establishment of a child advocacy focal point within the Department of Women, Youth and Sports, the Government will put in place activities that will promote the girl child in our society. Our national youth policy, which has recently been adopted, covers many concerns of young women and girls.

I am also pleased to announce to the Assembly that my Government has decided to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women. The instrument of accession will be deposited shortly.

Despite the efforts of my Government, women are still under-represented at policy and management levels in both the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations and churches. There is a great need to create political awareness through the education of women to increase their participation in the political process. The media can be a useful tool in my country in this regard. In March of this year, I spoke about the communication challenge, and I appealed to the Commonwealth Secretariat to mount a special diploma programme in communication. This would be a programme to graduate young people who are articulate, have the skills and motivations of critical analysis, have technical skills and can use the new information technology, can lead public debate, can venture into investigative journalism and who understand the importance of human rights.

At the subsistence level, women continue to be the major food producers and therefore play a very important role in the agriculture and fisheries sectors. Their role in food sufficiency and food security at the family level is vital. Several initiatives are under way, including a farmer support programme that has a women's enterprise development component that directly assists women.

The current ethnic tension in my country has caused tremendous difficulties for women and children on Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces, which are two of the main islands of the country. It has resulted in the disruption of food supplies; the repatriation of women, children and their families from one province to another; the closure of medical clinics and schools, depriving them of access to health services and education; and restrictions on the movement of people. As I speak here, women and children are suffering from these tensions.

As the Minister responsible for youth, I called for peace and reconciliation in my Mother's Day message, on 14 May. Our women have also held a major conference advocating peace, and adopted a communiqué reflecting our concerns.

As a result of the ethnic tension and the increasing unemployment situation, poverty is becoming more evident, especially in Honiara, and children are the worst hit. In collaboration with the

United Nations Development Programme, the Government is currently implementing a monitoring and planning project for the vulnerable.

Finally, international policy responses to resolve the formidable challenges of globalization and to utilize its benefits must take into account the concerns and needs of women. The advancement of women must be an integral part of our efforts to revitalize international cooperation and to address the challenges together. Education, to us, is the key to effective participation in the new global economy, from primary education to lifelong learning. It is central to sustainable development, social progress and human freedom. That is why the empowerment of women is critical. That is why educating the whole population is crucial. That is why educating the girl child to be a future mother is a must.

My Government's underlying principle will continue to be partnership in development. We should take pride in having men and women as equal partners. By working together, they can make a difference in the advancement of our country.

My statement would not be complete if I failed to confess that I believe in the God who created you and me and put us on this earth to enjoy it. I would like to quote some of my favourite words from the Bible, which always give me strength, courage and hope as a woman in the world today: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (*1 John 5:12*) This is my very own conviction.

Lastly, I wish to take this opportunity to express my profound appreciation to the United Nations here in New York, and especially to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his conviction that men and women are equally important for the livelihood and peace of future nations. Let us all use this occasion to genuinely recommit ourselves to the principles of the Beijing Declaration, and to work collectively towards the full realization of the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action in the twenty-first century.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Romaine Ndorimana, Minister for Social and Women's Affairs of Burundi.

Mrs. Ndorimana (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): As the work of the special session of the General Assembly on the appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action proceeds here at the United Nations, I have the honour on behalf of the Government and the people of Burundi to convey to you, Mr. President, and to all participants our sincere wishes for the success of these deliberations. I hope we shall together reach conclusions that can reorient the role of women in various spheres of activity and enable them to enjoy the rights for which they have struggled for so many years, but which society has unjustly withheld.

The great gathering at Beijing to which my country traveled five years ago took place in a world context that was difficult, especially in Africa — which even now, unfortunately, heads the world in fratricidal wars, of which women and children are the main victims. Sadly, my country, Burundi, is part of that trend. Without peace, it is illusory to speak of equality and development; the absence of peace prevents the enjoyment of the most fundamental rights.

It was against the background of the grave socio-political crisis which began in 1993 — that my country participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women and worked to follow up its outcome. We hope that that crisis will soon come to an end with the signing of peace agreements. In spite of these obstacles, we have formulated a national programme of action to follow up Beijing, focusing on six priority areas: peace and culture; health; education and training; the war on poverty; women's rights and the institutional machinery to advance them; and communications. It would take too long to enumerate all that has been achieved through this process, so I shall go through the priority areas very briefly.

First, with respect to peace, Burundian women through a variety of associations have organized activities to bring about peaceful coexistence, and they have proven to be a vital part of the quest for lasting peace in Burundi.

Secondly, in the sphere of health, we have implemented programmes and initiatives focusing on a steady improvement in the lives of mothers and children. Unfortunately, not all of these efforts have been as successful as we had hoped, for the obvious reasons I mentioned a moment ago.

Thirdly, on education and training, I am obliged to note that, even though, legally speaking, there is no discrimination against girls, sociocultural obstacles continue to prevent many girls from attending school or oblige them to leave at a very early age.

Fourthly, with regard to the war on poverty, a number of initiatives to involve women at the grass-roots level, including the establishment of a production syndicate, have been undertaken by the Government, United Nations agencies and women's organizations. As elsewhere, much remains to be done: we must give fresh life to our productive capacity, which was disrupted by six years of crisis.

Turning, fifthly, to the institutional machinery for the advancement of women, my Government has ratified all international conventions guaranteeing the equality of men and women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We are at present working to ensure that laws on succession form part of written law rather than customary law. With respect to women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making, there has for some time been sustained advocacy by women leaders, and I can state with full certainty that gender issues are being mainstreamed thanks to action by women themselves.

Finally, as to communications, women journalists are involved in all areas where women's interests are at stake, which has already brought about a positive change in the media's portrayal of women.

As I have briefly indicated, Burundi has not addressed the implementation of the entire Beijing Platform for Action, for the obvious reasons I mentioned earlier, but especially because of the embargo that neighbouring countries unjustly imposed against my country between 31 July 1996 and 23 January 1999. The harmful effects of that embargo can still be felt today, well after it was suspended. This situation has had multifaceted consequences; it nullified what we had worked so hard to achieve in all sectors of national life. The post-Beijing appraisal is taking place in a world characterized by social inequality and by increased poverty in developing countries.

I cannot conclude without reminding the international community, and principally the United Nations, of how urgent it is to resume cooperation with Burundi and to provide determined support to the women of Burundi in their endeavours to improve life in their country. Even at the height of the crisis, it has been women, mainly as heads of household, who have had to ensure the survival of our people, leaving the camps and returning to the land. Burundi is essentially an agricultural country, and these women have had to feed the many children orphaned by war and by the AIDS pandemic. These women deserve support also, so they will not think their efforts on all fronts simultaneously are being ignored.

In our view, these deliberations should provide an opportunity to continue our action to strengthen international solidarity, especially with women's organizations. The Assembly should propose specific measures to close the gap between rich countries and poor countries; it should forever eradicate gender discrimination and violence against women; it should propose measures to promote education, especially women's education; and it should consolidate the attainments made in the area of women's rights.

I wish for the success of our deliberations. Women the world over look forward to meeting the challenges they face at the beginning of this new millennium.

Mrs. Al-Barwany (Oman): On behalf of the delegation of the Sultanate of Oman, it is with honour and great pride that I present Oman's post-Beijing positive experience and reaffirm our commitment to the Platform for Action.

Oman's development history in the modern context started in 1970, with the accession to the throne of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said. Since then, Oman has moved from a primarily rural society to a prosperous modern State. By 1995, the situation of girls and women had undergone a remarkable transformation, especially with regard to the basic quality-of-life indicators. The pre-Beijing review process highlighted the need to focus more attention on girls and women in their own right and as increasingly active partners in the public domain. Issues such as visibility in data, personal status, social, economic and political participation were given priority. The need to review and refine policy approaches and support structures for women and girls was at the forefront of our agenda. As a result, Oman's fifth Five-year Development Plan, formulated before the finalization of the Beijing Platform for Action, had proactively addressed several gender concerns.

Allow me to highlight here a few of Oman's significant achievements. In health care and quality of life indicators, a reduction in mortality rates and an increased life expectancy due to universal access to maternal and child health services have been attained.

Health education campaigns have resulted in a successful birth-pacing programme that has reduced the fertility rate from 7.8 per cent to 4.7 per cent in the last five years. A steep increase in the contraception prevalence rate to 40.4 per cent, and the rising female age of marriage have both had an impact on reducing the population growth rate. There have been similarly striking advances for girls in the context of educational access and attainment, whereby in 1997-1998 female enrolment made up 48.5 per cent of the total school enrolment. A significant number of girls are going on to tertiary levels, outpacing and outperforming boys in many areas. Parallel gains were recorded in the adult literacy rate as a result of efforts to expand and strengthen female literacy programmes, particularly in rural areas. A number of activities, including workshops, curriculum reform and communication initiatives, have been successful in increasing gender awareness.

The Sultanate's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1996 added impetus to the strengthening of the girl-child focus, and subsequent awareness campaigns were launched to publicize and promote children's rights. Women's enhanced participation in all fields of national development is being actively promoted, with public proclamations from the highest level and a demonstrated Government interest resulting in positive civil service rules that place, promote and create training opportunities for women. Initiatives to increase women's participation in the labour market have yielded substantial dividends, with the numbers in civil service going up from 19 per cent in 1994 to 26 per cent in 1998, with women being promoted to senior levels. Alhough the largest concentration of women is still in health and education, the recent move into fields such as engineering, marketing and finance has given women greater access to private sector job opportunities. Government training programmes and poverty reduction schemes centre on increasing women's economic self-reliance through income-generating programmes and increased access to soft loans. Efforts to build female skills and competencies have enabled their entry into diverse fields, including entrepreneurship.

In the field of participation and decision-making, both the State Council and the Consultative Council included women upon their inception. Today, I am a proud to say that 29 women are candidates for the upcoming Consultative Council elections, and we have high hopes that their increased representation will reflect greater participation by women. I must hasten to add that the right to vote for the Consultative Council has already been granted to Omani women.

Concerted efforts have been directed at ensuring a wider participation of women in local-level decision-making on community issues. The organized non-governmental organizations sector is still at an initial stage in Oman. However, efforts to expand the scope of activities and strengthen their management capacity have led to an increase in the number of women's associations from 17 to 25 in the last five years. A significant step forward in this respect has been the establishment of the Coordination Committee for Women's Voluntary Work, with a key role in coordinating, planning and researching women-related issues.

Positive constitutional and legal provisions advocate women's involvement in the public and personal spheres. Gender equality, in accordance with the tenets of Islamic shariah, is an underlying principle of the Omani Basic Law of the State and the Personal Status Law. The aforementioned pieces of legislation were drafted with special attention given to the empowerment of women through their rights derived from shariah law, and this has led to considerable headway in advancing principles embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. With enlightened leadership, strong political will and support, Omani women need only take advantage of and utilize the opportunities made available to them.

Five years can be an adequate period of time for accelerated development, or just a wasted moment in the history of nations. In the context of the Beijing Platform for Action, Oman's experience has been a cause for much jubilation. Yet it is recognized that we need to make further efforts to sustain and reinforce our accomplishments.

In order to address our unfinished agenda, specific future actions are being formulated to address under-reporting in national statistics; to change perceptions about women's role; and increase awareness of better living concepts and productive options. Improving the quality of education and making it relevant to girls is a priority, while special attention

is being given to improving the nutritional status of women and girls.

New socio-economic challenges are being faced as changing patterns in lifestyle are bringing about rapid accelerations in urbanization and consumerism. Information outreach programmes to increase developmental options for rural women are being formulated in this context, and capacity-building in general has taken on a more meaningful role.

To ensure the sustainability of progress made, and to build on achievements for further development, the Government of the Sultanate of Oman is committed to continuing its implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to working in cooperation with the relevant bodies of the United Nations system to realize a promising future for Omani women and for all women of the world.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Jarmila Moravek de Cerruto, Vice-Minister for Gender and Family Affairs of Bolivia.

Mrs. Moravek de Cerruto (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my country and my Government, I would like to begin by expressing to you, Mr. President, our congratulations on your leadership of this grand event, the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women in the Year 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

In a global context of dizzying and contradictory changes that make it difficult to have a clear understanding of reality, the women of the world are meeting to share the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted without reservation by 189 countries.

In the past five years, women's struggle to gain respect for their human rights has developed within the framework of a globalized world in which poverty is worsening as a result of an unfair distribution and concentration of income: 15 per cent of the population of the world earns 85 per cent of the income, while the other 85 per cent earns only 15 per cent. Unfortunately, the same applies to the resources and wealth necessary for development. There is, therefore, a dramatic, marked difference between rich and poor countries. As the Minister for Foreign Relations of Bolivia stated during the general debate in the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, for the less developed countries globalization is a threat, because poverty, unemployment and corruption are also being globalized on a massive scale.

In this rather negative general context, despite the progress made towards the attainment of full citizenship rights and development for women, we must acknowledge that there are still many obstacles. Implementing the Platform for Action will require greater political will, increased economic and financial resources and better institutional capacity-building.

Today, few can ignore women's rights, and no one can doubt the contribution of women to the development of nations. We are also convinced that the greatest obstacle for developing countries are the political and economic limitations on our States in applying sustainable social programmes to ensure not only the reduction of poverty, but the effective incorporation of the gender perspective into policy-making and the rights of women, as a non-negotiable and inherent condition of a new type of human development.

In Bolivia, governmental actions designed to create conditions to empower women and to ensure the full exercise of their rights and their access to power have contributed to the development of public policies in this respect, but they are not yet sufficient to integrate women completely into all stages of development with equality of opportunity.

In an environment of profound change in the relationship between the State and civil society, efforts and resources are being brought together for a joint endeavour to overcome gender inequality. Mobilizing Bolivian women and institutionalizing women's issues in the State structure are opening up areas in different parts of society, granting validity and importance to an area that has so much to do with strengthening democracy and ensuring development based on equality in diversity.

In fulfilling the objectives of the global Platform for Action, we have made important achievements in the judicial, legal and normative spheres. At the State level, the search for gender equality in the field of education essentially takes the form of incorporating the issue into the entire education reform process, while critically appraising the roles of men and women in different areas of life and highlighting the overall development of their potential. The strategic health programme includes specific plans and projects

relating to sexual and reproductive health. The decision to reduce mortality rates by providing basic health insurance coverage for miscarriages during the first six months of pregnancy is an advance of fundamental importance.

Violence is no longer a private affair; it is now covered by public policies. The law against family or domestic violence and the Supreme Decree on equality of opportunity for men and women provide the legal framework that defines family violence and discrimination on the basis of gender as matters for the State. Likewise, the National Plan for preventing and eradicating violence against women, which is considered to be the national strategy, establishes integral services for the prevention of violence and comprehensive care for women in situations of violence.

With the strategic objective of achieving equal and lasting access for women to power structures, specific laws have been introduced in the national legal bodies, including the electoral code and the laws governing political parties and municipalities. As a result, there has been a significant increase in women's participation in municipal councils, from 9.5 per cent in 1995 to 42.1 per cent in 1999.

Such achievements have been made in the legal area in particular, but the same cannot be said of cultural patterns and practices. Bolivia would therefore like to raise several points at this important session. In order to better implement the global Platform for Action in the medium term, we consider it essential to ratify the consensus obtained in 1995 at the global level and to incorporate regional factors that emerged from the evaluation processes. In this context, Bolivia would like to state firmly that it has adhered to the agreements reached at the eighth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place in Lima in February this year.

It is of vital importance that the States that have not yet signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women do so as soon as possible. Only thus will we be able to demonstrate a greater political will and commitment to reducing the distance between formal and factual reality and thereby allow women the real and total exercise of their rights.

We exhort the developed countries to make genuine efforts to obtain a fair and equitable distribution of the world's wealth. Similarly, we urge the developing countries of our region and the world to define a current of thought and action that will enhance the sovereignty and self-determination of our nations.

So long as women continue to die for preventable reasons; so long as segregation for reasons of gender and violence in its various forms and expressions persist; so long as attempts continue to be made to justify cultural and religious practices, such as genital mutilation, that infringe upon the fundamental rights of women, we will not be able to speak of equality, development or peace.

Finally, we summon the peoples of the world, the Governments of the world and, especially, the women of the world to join forces to overcome the obstacles encountered over the course of these past five years, in the hope of launching a new millennium that will lead us to the construction of ever more democratic, just and equitable societies.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aksoltan Ataeva, Chairperson of the delegation of Turkmenistan.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Permit me to greet all the participants of the current session and all those who made a contribution to achieving progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. I wish them further success.

Having won independence, pondered our history and traditions and organically linked them to present-day realities, we have elaborated our own model of statehood that corresponds to the national mentality and traditions of the Turkmen people and the universal principles of mankind. They have become the basis for building a democratic, law-governed secular State, an independent and neutral Turkmenistan.

Issues of the family and of women's social and economic status hold a special place in our country. They have acquired renewed prominence and relevance under the impact of modernization processes that are under way throughout the world. In spite of the diverse and exceptional complexity of the tasks facing our newly independent State, President Saparmurat Niyazov and the Government have identified women's problems and constitutional status, support of motherhood and protection of the family as top priorities of State policy.

The development of all social institutions, ranging from state governance to scientific and social organizations, and the further democratization of society are inseparably linked to ensuring women's equality. The Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women has been implemented in a number of state-wide programmes relating to the education, health and social and economic status of women in Turkmenistan. The Constitution and laws of the country grant women equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, political, cultural and social life. They guarantee women not only equal, but often preferential rights.

Mr. Jordán-Pando (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

For many centuries, the Turkmen people have held high the authority of the institution of the family and the dissolution of a family is therefore considered to be an exceptional occasion. The family helps form the high moral principles that are traditional for the Turkmen people: modesty, industry and respect for the mother and elders of the family.

The laws of the country guarantee women equal opportunities for realizing their aspirations in running the affairs of the State as well as in public and economic matters. The 1999 elections to the *Medjlis* of Turkmenistan and local organs of power bore witness to the democratic processes under way in the country. Their results show that women account for 26 per cent of all elected officials.

In December 1995, Turkmenistan adopted the Declaration on International Obligations in the Field of Human Rights and Freedoms and brought its legislation into line with international instruments by ratifying and acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women and others. The system of standards ensuring the legal status of women is based on the democratic principle of the rule of law. This key principle of democratic society is an indispensable element of equality for all citizens, regardless of gender.

Turkmenistan has created a large-scale and diverse system of material and social benefits to support motherhood and children, women who have many children and single mothers. These benefits include the payment of social subsidies to families with many children; the sale of foodstuffs at State-subsidized prices; free electricity, gas and water; the lowest possible rent for apartments; free secondary and higher education; supplementary paid maternity leave; paid leave for childcare, and so on. The State allocates 40 to 50 per cent of its budget to the social sphere in order to enhance the effectiveness of social programmes.

Considerable progress has been achieved in educating women, 98 per cent of whom receive education, including over 41 per cent with higher education. Access to education is open because it is free. As private property and entrepreneurship take root in the country, it is becoming necessary to teach women the basics of business, new technologies and alternative forms of education. To that end, numerous business schools and education courses have been opened, including computer classes. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Bureau for Women in Development are providing considerable help in this sphere.

The State system of public health, financed almost entirely from the country's budget, ensures the implementation of most programmes affecting every aspect of women's health. They include the State Health Programme; programmes for the protection of motherhood and children; joint programmes with UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, aimed primarily at promoting a healthy way of life, preventing diseases and encouraging breastfeeding and reproductive health. We highly appreciate the activities and help of the United Nations in addressing gender-related issues.

The environment is one of the most important factors in improving people's health. The Government of my country has adopted a programme for providing the people with safe water and the steady implementation of this programme has helped to reduce the incidence of infectious diseases and to eliminate sources of infection, and thus to reduce mortality among children.

We cannot consider the problem of the role and place of women in contemporary society to be entirely resolved in our country. The radical transformation of the social system and the change in social guidelines and incentives have created certain difficulties. Genuine freedom, the involvement of women in complex processes, their active role in building a democratic society and the good governance of the

country require a high level of social and legal culture and the establishment of a proactive attitude to help women to counter old stereotypes of their role and place in the family and social life.

The women's social movement, formed under the new democratic conditions, has contributed to the enhancement of the public role and authority of women. It is working together with non-governmental organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, and cooperating with international women's organizations.

In reaffirming his commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action, President Saparmurat Niyazov of Turkmenistan is guiding the policy of enhancing women's role in society in order to attain these goals. He once said that our people dearly respect the honour and dignity of our women, and it is our duty to mothers, wives and daughters to ensure a dignified life, stability and prosperity for our women.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on Ms. Rosalyn Hazelle, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Community, Social Development and Gender Affairs of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Ms. Hazelle (Saint Kitts and Nevis): On behalf of the Government and the people of Saint Kitts and Nevis, I take this opportunity to congratulate the President on his able leadership of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. I am assured that with his skills and experience, he will guide us to a successful conclusion of this historic meeting.

I welcome this opportunity to commend the Commission on the Status of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women for their untiring efforts for the convening of this very important special session. This session allows for the timely appraisal of steps taken to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and to reiterate my Government's commitments.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis, being fully committed to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and desirous of prioritizing the realization of gender equity, development and peace in our society, undertook, with the assistance of civil society, a wide-ranging review of the status of our women. This was done with a view to establishing how our policies and laws promoted gender equality and equity, and was initiated using a rights-based approach. The review process highlighted significant achievements in the elimination of many forms of direct discrimination with regard to women's access to education, health and social security and to their overt support for and participation in the electoral process. Legislative and policy gaps were also highlighted in areas such as violence against women and poverty.

Of the critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis concentrated on the following: violence against women and girls, women and poverty, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, women's health and women in leadership and decision-making positions.

Following this review, an integrated gender and development plan was developed and incorporated into the macroeconomic planning framework. Through this five-year plan, my Government committed itself to a gender analysis and planning component of all development policies and programmes.

To ensure a systematic and coordinated approach to gender-sensitive policies and programmes, the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis implemented a Gender Management System, which resulted in the strengthening and formalizing of linkages between the Ministry with responsibility for women's affairs and other ministries. The Gender Management System has facilitated the training of senior policy makers and planners in gender analysis and planning, and continues to be critical in the building of institutional capacity within the Ministry responsible for women's affairs. This was done with the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat and was largely due to an enabling environment, the most important component being political will. In fact, our implementation of the Commonwealth Secretariat Gender Budget Initiative to assess the potential differential impact on our national budget was instigated by the Prime Minister, in his capacity as Minister of Finance.

Recognizing that women needed to be empowered to articulate their needs and concerns, my Government launched a campaign to increase women's participation at all levels. The campaign provided training to women through educational and other advocacy tools to strengthen women's leadership capacity and skills and to increase public sensitivity in this area. This commitment has resulted in a significant

increase in the number of women in senior positions within the civil service.

With respect to violence against women and girls, legislative amendments have been enacted which increase the penalties for all forms of sexual abuse. This legal development mirrors a widespread awareness of the seriousness of such forms of abuse. Further, this year the Domestic Violence Act was passed by our Parliament. This Act increases women's legal options and ensures access to the courts for the purpose of seeking protective relief from all forms of domestic abuse.

These two legislative advances in the area of violence against women and girls are concrete expressions of the commitment of my Government to guarantee to all women and girls the full protection of the law from all forms of abuse, whether they occur in the public or the private sphere.

Legal reform is most effective when accompanied by changes in the culture and attitudes of all citizens and public personnel. To this end, my Government has instituted mandatory gender-sensitive modules on human rights and violence against women and girls within the police training programmes. In addition, we have provided training to health personnel, guidance counsellors and child-care workers to enhance their capacity to provide supportive and gender-sensitive services to victims of violence.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis has also sought specifically to extend reproductive health programmes and services for all women. In the context of a relatively high prevalence of breast and cervical cancers in the Caribbean region, breast examinations and cervical cancer screenings have been instituted.

Adolescent mothers can discern our commitment to the reproductive health of, and rights and services for, women and the girl child from the Government's commitment to work hard to eliminate the discriminatory attitude towards attendance at school.

My Government has sought to meet the housing needs associated with natural disasters by building 1,200 housing units since 1995, of which the majority has been allocated to women.

We wish to take this opportunity to call on the international community to take account of the economic and physical vulnerability of small island developing States in the formulation of development indices as well as international cooperation.

As my Government continues to meet the challenge of ensuring the elimination of all forms of gender discrimination and the advancement of social equity and justice, it is doing so in an environment of limited economic resources. We wish to echo the concerns, some of which are contained in the Lima Consensus, that economic globalization, external debt and the erosion of trade preferential margins have had negative impacts on the lives and situation of women, particularly those of the small island developing States. It is our request that concerns regarding the issues that impact on developing countries in general, and those of the Caribbean Community in particular, form part of the deliberations that will ensue during the convening of the Millennium Summit.

Without question, certain material gains have been made in advancing social justice and gender equity. There are still, however, challenges ahead, and many of these are related to the need to change the cultural relations of gender. We understand that the root causes of violence against women and the unequal sharing of family responsibilities are directly related to the construction of forms of masculinity which prioritize cultures of dominance and power over cultures of peace.

During this millennial year, we look forward to the adoption of further initiatives and programmes which will advance the goals of development, gender equality and peace.

In closing, I wish to repeat the words of the Secretary-General:

> "We are not guests on this planet. We belong here." (*A/S-23/PV.1*)

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abylabek Asankanov of the Office of the President of Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Asankanov (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): On behalf of my delegation, let me congratulate His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his assumption of the presidency of this historic special session on gender equality, development and peace. I would like to express our hope that, under his able leadership, the outcome of the special session will be successful.

Let me also express special thanks to the Preparatory Committee for the enormous efforts they made during the extremely difficult preparatory process. The main objective of this important session is comprehensively to review and appraise the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and ensure that the commitments undertaken by the Member States are fully realized.

The twentieth century was a time of unprecedented social transformations and political upheavals, all of them large-scale and with almost immediate impact. The women of Kyrgyzstan, as all those in Asia, have, within a relatively short period of time, lived through unprecedented and far-reaching events with longterm consequences.

The women of Kyrgyzstan play a leading role in family life, and they have shown a high level of skill and ability in resolving the difficult problems related to social life. It is with pride that I mention here today that the Kurmanjan Datka — the "Alai queen" and famous Kyrgyz governor — was respected by all the foreign rulers she met during her reign, even by Kokand Khan, the guardian of Muslim norms in the nineteenth century. At that time, it was considered astounding that a woman could govern such a huge territory as the Ferghana valley, which encompasses the areas of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

With its recent accession to independence, the transition to a market economy and the democratization of its society, Kyrgyzstan has been going through a fundamental and radical reorganization of its social structure. The women of Kyrgyzstan are now experiencing extremely difficult socio-economic conditions. Active measures are being undertaken to eliminate poverty and unemployment and to bring more women into the social sphere.

The 12 critical areas of concern in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action are playing a major role in advancing the status of women. A number of radical and strategic measures have been adopted by the Government to this end.

By decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Askar Akayev, 1996 was proclaimed the Year of the Woman; and the "Ayalzat" national programme — a word that means "women" — was elaborated and approved. This programme includes obligations in the twelve critical areas and assistance from the Government budget towards their implementation. In addition, women's initiative centres on the implementation of the "Ayalzat" programme have been established in various regions of Kyrgyzstan.

The State Commission on Family, Women and Youth affairs, created by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, includes in its structure the newly established Women's Institute. Commissions on the family and women's issues have been set up in both Chambers of Parliament. Five international conventions on women's issues, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, have been ratified.

Parliamentarian hearings have been organized on women's issues, and in the legislative area a review has been carried out of a draft on gender equality — in other words, a legal basis for advancement of women is being developed. Since 1998, a new stage has begun in the process of the achievement of gender equality: the President of the Kyrgyz Republic established the National Council on Gender Policy.

In the last five years, more than 100 women's non-governmental organizations have been created, many of which are now participating at the international level. A number of conferences and seminars on human rights have been held, with the active support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other international organizations. Faculties, departments, schools and centres for research on gender issues have been created.

In 1999 Kyrgyzstan, in a timely manner, submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations its first national report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 2000 Kyrgyzstan become a member of the United Nations Commission on the Advancement of Women.

I wish to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to international organizations — UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, among others — for their strong support of the efforts of Kyrgyz women and for their actions to implement the principles of gender equality.

A new mode of interrelating is emerging among the Kyrgyz people owing to the transition to a market economy. The culture of business and finance is developing, the motivation to become self-employed is increasing, and dependence upon the Government is diminishing.

A great psychological transformation in the cultural psyche, and especially in women's minds, has occurred during this period of transition because of issues of economic security.

The Kyrgyz Government and civil society are undertaking broad and concrete measures to strengthen the status of women. We understand that the leadership of every country has a responsibility to care for its people and its women as a part of society. But sometimes there are circumstances that make it impossible for a country to overcome its problems on its own.

In this regard, I would like to mention that last year some religious extremists suddenly penetrated the border of our country, took local and foreign people hostage, killed Japanese and Kyrgyz civilians and occupied part of our territory. All these events took place in the Batken region. Due to the events in Batken, the social and economic conditions in Kyrgyzstan worsened. The conflict in Batken left dozens of widows and orphans; their losses were intolerable, and much damage occurred that could not be compensated.

New difficulties in the areas of education, health, employment and other spheres have arisen. I have to admit that the vulnerable, newly established democracy in Kyrgyzstan does not have sufficient resources to overcome these problems. We therefore need broad support from the international community to deal with these challenges.

In spite of all the difficulties we face today, the Government of my country will continue its efforts further to realize the Beijing Platform for Action. The implementation of economic and political reforms in Kyrgyzstan will include the establishment of gender equality and equal opportunity.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the delegation of Ecuador, Her Excellency Mrs. María Isabel Baquerizo de Noboa.

Mrs. Baquerizo de Noboa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): The objective of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held at Beijing in September 1995, was to review and update strategies aimed at the advancement of women. Ecuador resolutely assumed that commitment and took into consideration women's demands to design the equal opportunity plan for the period 1996-2000, which constitutes the cross-cutting technical tool that guides all areas of public policy to promote the development of programmes and projects benefiting women and the girl child.

In the area of institutional mechanisms, the National Women's Council was created as a body accountable to the presidency of the country, thereby placing it at the highest political level. It is made up of representatives of the Government and civil society. It is worth emphasizing the close relationship between the State and the women's movement, which together promote the advancement of women and the well-being of their families. That joint effort produced its most significant success after the extraordinary political negotiations that made it possible for the large majority of women's specific collective rights to be included in the new Constitution of the Republic, which has been in effect since 1998.

The current crisis in the country affects Ecuadorian women in particular, diminishing their options for subsistence and personal well-being. This is one of the main obstacles impeding the achievement of person-centred development, and it threatens the progress made in bringing about gender equality.

It is for this reason that the current Government is implementing a social emergency plan that contains focused policies whose principal beneficiaries are women from the poorest sectors of society. The greatest effort is oriented towards the greatest challenges, namely, developing employment and income-generating policies and programmes, improving access to resources for rural and indigenous women and strengthening the women's movement and women's organizations.

Despite the current problems, significant gains have been made in the legislative arena since 1995 with regard to the rights of women, and various policies favouring women have been enacted. Mechanisms to promote participation by civil society in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public

polici s on gender have been expanded. The regulating body of those mechanisms is the National Women's Council, which has strengthened womens' status as citizens and consolidated important equity-ensuring processes during this period.

I wish to emphasize that this new initiative includes the implementation and upcoming setting into motion of the law on cost-free maternity, which provides for pre-natal, parturition and post-partum medical attention, and medical check-ups for children from birth to five years of age. In this way we hope to reduce maternal and infant mortality and enable women to exercise their right to be cared for at a health centre in order to ensure they can successfully bring their pregnancy to term. We also hope that this will serve to promote recognition of the importance of the role of women in the care and protection of their children, to protect the family as the basis of society and help in the detection of such illnesses as cancer and AIDS.

We have also implemented the law on political quotas, which requires that women make up 30 per cent of candidate lists for elections to public office. I am sure that this very important objective will give rise to new leadership and new political practices in Ecuador as it consolidates its democracy.

There are currently 22 women's centres in Ecuador, located in every province. They are modelled on non-governmental organizations, and their work is strengthened by the ongoing technical assistance provided by the National Women's Council and is carried out under the aegis of a government ministry. The centres' operations and services have resulted in a discernible drop in the level of family abuse. Their accomplishments, which have already been evaluated, have had a positive impact on the daily lives of many Ecuadorian families.

I believe that the Member States of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, international bodies and international financial institutions in particular, together with civil society, are called on today more than ever before to support Governments in their efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action so that more women and girls will have access to knowledge and new technologies — which are necessary tools for joining the workforce — and so that they will be able to substantially improve their quality of life and have their rights respected.

Ecuador, for its part, is resolved to make those rights a reality. To that end, we hope to be able to count on the necessary international cooperation.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jemat Haji Ampal, Chairman of the delegation of Brunei Darussalam to the United Nations.

Mr. Jemat (Brunei Darussalam): I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election as President of the General Assembly at this special session. We look forward to a very successful session under his wise and skilful guidance.

As our Minister for Foreign Affairs has stated before the General Assembly on several occasions, Brunei Darussalam wishes to give the United Nations every support in its efforts to improve the day-to-day lives of ordinary people and to bring direct benefits to their families and communities. Ensuring that women realize their full human potential is an essential aspect of that work. As the Secretary-General said earlier in this session, empowering women not only means better lives for women; it means better lives for everyone on the planet, men and women alike. We therefore appreciate the opportunity afforded us at this session to review what has been achieved since the Beijing Conference.

In that spirit, I would like to report briefly on the progress we have made so far in Brunei Darussalam in fulfilling United Nations recommendations in this area. We have recognized the overall need to institute policies that are not gender-biased. As a result, we have been benefiting considerably from the impact Brunei women are making in all aspects of national development. This is especially so in education, where we have seen a marked increase in the number of female students enrolled in our tertiary educational institutions. The total enrolment of women students in tertiary education increased from just over 50 per cent in 1994 to nearly 70 per cent in 1997. We now have a situation in which women outnumber men at our institutions of higher education. In addition, school enrolment, from pre-school upwards, is virtually universal.

In terms of employment, national policy has led to increased job opportunities for women, and these have been accompanied by a marked shift in social attitudes towards the professional standing of women.

Equal job opportunities now exist in the civil service and have been matched by equal pay.

In economic development, women in Brunei Darussalam are playing a very important role in our national plan. The percentage of women in the labour force has steadily increased over the past five years and is now well over 50 per cent. At the same time, the Government and non-governmental and private organizations have recognized the needs of working mothers and have taken measures to counter possible adverse effects on families. In private enterprises, women are extremely active in business ventures, both locally and abroad. In this field, the Government also provides equal incentives to men and women and has particularly encouraged women to develop their own small and medium-sized enterprises into high-tech and knowledge-based industries.

In the light of these positive developments, Brunei Darussalam is very pleased to be hosting the meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Women Leaders Network 2000 in 10 days' time. The theme of the meeting is small to medium enterprises as global traders, and participants will be looking closely at the challenges and opportunities arising from globalization.

We have also made progress in the provision of health care that is cost-effective and is accessible to both men and women. Preventive and promotive health-care programmes, especially for women, are given high priority. These include education about reproductive health, safe motherhood, female-related cancers, heart disease and general nutrition. In addition, thanks to programmes designed to promote antenatal care, breastfeeding and nutritional advice for mothers, we have seen a decline in infant mortality rates. Overall, the life expectancy of women in our country at present is 78 years, compared to 73 years for men.

To protect the welfare of women, children and families, the Government of Brunei Darussalam recently introduced the emergency married women order and the guardianship of infants order of 1999. This protects the rights of those women not covered by the Islamic family law, and includes maintenance for wives and children. These policies are complemented by measures adopted by the Islamic shariah court, which also reflect a nationwide concern for the welfare of women under modern conditions.

The Government is also in the process of introducing a children and young persons act which will protect girls and young women below 18 years of age from discrimination, abuse and neglect. Strong legislation has existed since 1972 to protect women and girls against sexual exploitation, and offences against women and girls are treated extremely seriously. Further legislation and plans of action are also being considered to increase levels of protection for women even further.

We are by no means satisfied that we have provided women in our country with all that they require or with the total social protection that is their right. However, I can assure the Assembly that we are conscious of the need to be constantly vigilant in this area. We are ready to join the rest of the international community under the guidance of the United Nations to ensure that women are fully able to realize their potential as happy and productive individuals in our society and as the living heart of our families.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Ms. Liz Gordon, Member of Parliament, House of Representatives of New Zealand.

Ms. Gordon (New Zealand): It is an honour to address the General Assembly at this special session on an issue as important to the Government of New Zealand as gender equality, development and peace for our new century. We welcome this opportunity to affirm our commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as the fundamental blueprint for the achievement of women's equality. Through review and appraisal of our efforts since Beijing we can see where progress has been made. We can also see where obstacles have prevented us from moving forward and can use our collective knowledge and creativity to find strategies for overcoming them.

In many areas, there has been significant progress for women around the world since Beijing, and since Nairobi before it. The efforts of Governments, United Nations agencies, regional and international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society in general to implement the Platform have had real results in improving the status of women.

But it is equally clear that we have a long way to go. Women continue to suffer discrimination because of their gender. They suffer disproportionately from the effects of poverty and armed conflict. They continue to encounter barriers to justice and to the enjoyment of

their human rights because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, disability or socio-economic status, or their status as indigenous people, migrants, displaced persons or refugees.

Building on our commitments at Beijing, and on what we have learned since then, we must continue to set new goals and identify new measures for women's equality and empowerment. Where new factors that affect women's equality and attainment of the full realization of their human rights have emerged, the same commitment and creativity must be applied to addressing these.

New Zealand remains committed to the protection and promotion of women's rights as human rights, and to its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In particular, the New Zealand Government has expressed its intention to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which will be a key tool for women in fully realizing their human rights. The Convention provides the underlying legal framework for achieving the goals of Beijing. We urge those States that have not ratified the Convention to do so.

In encouraging gender equity it is important that nation-States are just as honest about the challenges they face as about their successes. Only in that way will Governments and international institutions find solutions that take fully into account the effects of their policies on women.

Since 1995, New Zealand has continued to undergo significant social and economic changes, which have continued to have an impact on the status and development potential of women, and especially women who face more than one form of disadvantage. New Zealand's commitment to ending remaining gender-based discrimination and to promoting the rights of women remains high on the Government's agenda. In particular, attention is being given to achieving women's economic independence as a basis for empowering women in all areas where equality is yet to be achieved.

Working women in New Zealand earn about 80 per cent of the average male wage. The gender pay gap appears to be widening for female graduates, a trend that coincides with an increase in women's participation in tertiary education. Although the pay gap has narrowed for the lowest paid, this relates to men's wages falling rather than to women's wages rising.

In one crucial area, the gender pay gap has closed: our Parliament has a woman Prime Minister, a woman leader of the opposition and 10 female ministers, while a total of 30 per cent of our elected representatives are women, not to mention the Chief Justice of New Zealand. Thus, women now play a critical leadership role. Nevertheless, there remain in place policies which may appear equal, but which have unequal effects for women. One example is that while our legislation provides for the equal division of matrimonial property, in its application it has proved inadequate in recognizing the unvalued contributions of women to a relationship. My Government is currently addressing this issue, as well as that of ensuring equitable property settlements in the dissolution of de facto and same-sex relationships.

A further example is that student loans cost women more than men as a result of women's pay differential with men. Although they may borrow the same amount, women take longer to pay off their loans than men, and thus pay more interest.

Like all developed nations, New Zealand's economy relies heavily on women's participation at the productive and reproductive level, both in paid employment and as mothers. The New Zealand Government is committed to equal employment opportunity legislation that provides a framework which enables women to achieve their full potential as citizens, and discussions are under way in order to institute a new system of paid parental leave.

Increasing awareness and more concerted action to address violence against women as a violation of their human rights has been a key success since Beijing. Whether it is violence within the home, as is 80 per cent of violence in New Zealand, or that associated with armed conflict, the underlying social and economic causes must be addressed if we are to find real solutions. It is women and children who bear the brunt of violent conflict. Women are left to deal with the consequences of battles which they often have no part in conducting. Despite this, they are often deprived of a place at the peace table and a decision-making role in post-conflict reconstruction.

More must be done to recognize the role of women as peace makers. In our own region, women

took a leading role in bringing to a close nine years of secessionist conflict on the island of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea.

We welcome the adoption of the Rome Statute for the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which recognizes gender-related crimes as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Legislation is currently before the New Zealand Parliament to enable us to ratify the Statute.

The Platform also provides for action to address the particular needs and situation of indigenous women around the world. The New Zealand Government is committed to looking at ways to close the social and economic gaps between Maori — the indigenous people of New Zealand — and non-Maori women, and minimizing the risk of further gaps developing. The Prime Minister, Helen Clark, is leading this work.

Over time, Maori women have felt the impact of economic restructuring of the industries and occupations they work in. A decline in job opportunities for Maori women and increased responsibilities as single parents have combined to limit Maori women's access to employment, with a consequent impact on the socio-economic status of Maori women and their communities. Many Maori women have sought their own economic empowerment through a range of small and medium-sized enterprises. Many run their own businesses or take an increasing part in professions including the law, medicine and training.

The Government is also driving a regional approach to economic development and job creation in New Zealand. This process will rely on the input and expertise of women from all ethnic and social backgrounds, and will ensure that the end result truly reflects the broad needs of the entire community. Finally, New Zealand welcomes the positive contribution the Commonwealth is making towards advancing the role of women, including through the Commonwealth Plan of Action update. My Government looks forward to hosting a Commonwealth South Pacific symposium on gender, politics and peace-building later this month. It will be another example of the Commonwealth's role in furthering, among other things, women's involvement in politics and conflict resolution.

At the beginning of the millennium, we need to take stock of our efforts to date, and find new and innovative ways of working together in partnerships to achieve the full equality of women and harness their contribution to peace and development for the twenty-first century.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Intisar Al-Wazir, Minister for Social Affairs of the Palestinian Authority.

Mrs. Al-Wazir (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to express to the President of the General Assembly our appreciation for his able leadership of this twenty-third special session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

This session is being viewed with the highest regard and accorded the highest importance by women throughout the world, particularly women in Palestine. We are here, five years after the Beijing Conference, to evaluate the achievements, assess the continuing obstacles and recommend procedures and initiatives to accelerate steps towards the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to ensure that we fulfil our commitments to achieving a better society founded on equality, justice and peace.

This will require clear vision and a true understanding of reality. It will also require an increase in the resources necessary for empowering women and promoting their political, economic and social development and status, thus enabling them to play a more effective and equal role in all areas.

Palestinian women, like all the people of Palestine, have long been deprived of the opportunity to develop their social and economic potential because of the continued Israeli occupation and Israel's oppressive policies, including the confiscation of land, the building and expansion of settlements, the dispossession of the Palestinian people, the judaization of occupied East Jerusalem, the violation of the territorial integrity of the Palestinian land, the continued detention of prisoners and the refusal to allow refugees and displaced Palestinians to return. All these factors have exacerbated the inability of Palestinian women to thoroughly implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

Despite all of these obstacles and difficulties in promoting a viable and comprehensive plan for sustainable development, which result from the

continuation of the occupation, the Palestinian people, and in particular Palestinian women, have, in the past five years, been able to establish the foundations for the social, economic and institutional development of the Palestinian State, which will soon be declared.

Similarly, the Palestinian Authority has succeeded in establishing the foundation for the educational, health and economic infrastructures, as well as the various structures and networks for development, taking into consideration the gender issue. Moreover, legislation and regulations have been promulgated concerning the affairs of the Palestinian people. All such legislation has been based on international standards for the promotion of democracy in Palestinian life and for securing the principles of justice and equality among the Palestinian people, men and women alike. Also, under very difficult circumstances, the Palestinian people have held their first democratic and transparent elections, under international supervision, for a legislative council. Setting a precedent in the region, a woman candidate participated in the elections for the post of president, and five women were elected to the 88-member legislative council. In addition, Palestinian women are participating in all areas of society through their work in the various departments and ministries of the Palestinian Authority.

Despite the prominence of Palestinian women in their own society, which was recognized in the highest legal Palestinian document, the Declaration of the State, their prominent role has not been reflected by equal participation at the decision-making level due to customs, traditions and the prevalence of a traditional mentality that views women as secondary participants in development.

In order to overcome all of these obstacles, and to promote the development of women, women's units in all of the Ministries have been created. Additionally, a women's unit was created in the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics. Moreover, a coordinating committee was established to coordinate work among the various units in the ministries helping to promote the status of Palestinian women. Also, the General Union of Palestinian Women, in cooperation with various women's committees and women's organizations, has created an active network.

The collective output of non-governmental and governmental organizations has resulted in a national strategy for Palestinian women that serves as the basis for future plans with a view to achieving the following goals: first, to define priorities and unite efforts to minimize the gender gap for the promotion of sustainable development; secondly, to coordinate the various programmes in order to serve the needs and objectives of the Palestinian development plan and to give priority to women in rural areas, refugee camps and women in poverty; thirdly, to review various policies and legislation in order to ensure that there is no gender discrimination, to work on the promotion of gender-sensitive legislation and to ensure its implementation; and fourthly, to develop a database of information about women and to empower the various women's units in the various ministries of the Palestinian Authority, the General Union of Palestinian Women and other women's organizations.

In spite of the recurring stalemate in the peace process, we wish to reaffirm the commitment of our people and their leadership to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace that guarantees the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, especially the rights to return, to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent State on all of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, the heart of which is Jerusalem, the city of peace.

I would also like to convey our deepest appreciation for the moral and financial support and assistance that has been provided by the community of nations. From this platform, I appeal to the international community, and especially to the United Nations, to continue to shoulder their responsibilities in connection with the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved in all its aspects, and to exert pressure on Israel to release all Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli jails and to implement all relevant United Nations resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and General Assembly resolution 194 (III), regarding the right of return.

Allow me here to reaffirm our solidarity with all women who are experiencing additional hardships and difficulties — those who struggle against foreign occupation and injustice everywhere. I refer in particular to the Syrian women in their struggle to end the occupation of all of the Golan, the Lebanese women, whom we congratulate on the end of the occupation of beloved southern Lebanon, and the Arab women of the entire region, including the Iraqi women

in their suffering due to the long-standing sanctions imposed on their country.

Palestinian women look forward to realizing the complete sovereignty of the independent Palestinian State on all of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, so that Palestine will be able to accede to all international conventions and treaties, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, because we firmly believe that without the attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, it will not be possible for Palestinian women to achieve equality or to achieve full integration in all areas of Palestinian life, for the achievement of necessary sustainable development for the Palestinian people.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.